



One Minute Guide



Why consider how we work with male caregivers?



This guide highlights why male caregivers are often overlooked, how to engage them safely and effectively, and how to identify and respond to risk.

Fathers and male caregivers play a key role in children's development, wellbeing and safety. Engaging them strengthens family resilience and reduces safeguarding risks. When they are not identified or included, important information and protective factors can be missed. Effective engagement, alongside robust risk management, improves outcomes.

Why does father involvement matter?

Research shows fathers have a significant impact on children's emotional, behavioural and cognitive development. Positive involvement is linked to better wellbeing, stronger learning outcomes, and fewer behavioural difficulties.

High-quality interactions such as play, reading, and shared activities, build resilience and support emotional development. Strong relationships with fathers are also linked to better social skills, emotional regulation and reduced risk-taking.

Fathers can be a key protective factor, particularly where there are parental mental health difficulties in their partner. Their involvement can reduce negative impacts of parental depression and the effectiveness of child mental health interventions.

Why do men often go unseen?

Despite their importance, fathers are often on the margins of professional involvement.



Day-to-day caregiving is still more visible in mothers, and services can default to viewing them as the "primary" parent, leading to fathers being overlooked in assessment, planning and decision-making

Non-resident fathers, stepfathers and other men in a child's life may go unidentified unless practitioners ask directly. Some fathers also report feeling excluded, judged or unclear about their role, making them less likely to engage.

Identifying Men in a Child's Life

Use non-judgemental questions to identify who is involved:

- **Who lives in the home?** (incl. temporary residents)
- **Who visits or stays overnight?**
- **Who provides care, regularly/occasionally?**
- **Who has emotional, digital or financial influence?**
- **Who does the child talk to?**

Map the men in the child's life, including:

- Biological fathers
- Stepfathers, partners, foster or adoptive parents
- Non-resident fathers and regular visitors
- Older male siblings
- Extended family (e.g. uncles, grandfathers)
- Friends or associates with regular contact

Working With Men Who Are High Risk

Core principles:

- Assess safety (including staff safety plans)
- Stay child-focused
- Separate risk from care
- Avoid collusion (challenge minimisation, denial and victim-blaming)

Practical tips:

- Use [motivational interviewing](#)
- Be consistent, clear and transparent
- Gather information from multiple sources - do not rely on one parent's account
- Identify patterns, triggers and protective factors
- Work with specialist services (e.g. domestic abuse, mental health, substance misuse)
- Maintain multi-agency oversight - no single service should manage high-risk men alone



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Barriers Men Face in Engagement

- Not seen as the main caregiver
- Perception that services are “for mums”
- Fear of blame, judgement, or being viewed as a risk.
- Cultural or generational expectations about parenting
- Work patterns limiting involvement
- Negative experiences with services
- Low confidence in parenting skills
- Practical barriers (e.g. literacy, transport, language, [neurodiversity](#))

Recognising these barriers helps tailor engagement and avoid misinterpreting reluctance as lack of interest, [Read more here](#)

How To Engage With Men

Engaging fathers requires a respectful, clear and child-focused approach. Treat them as key partners in safeguarding from the outset - be explicit about their role, expectations and the value they bring. Use simple, jargon-free communication and recognise strengths early to build trust.

Be flexible to support engagement: offer appointments outside standard hours, contact fathers directly, and consider work patterns. Practical suggestions (e.g. play, reading, routines) can help fathers strengthen relationships with their children. Acknowledge small steps to reinforce engagement.

Why Stay Professionally Curious?

Professional curiosity helps to understand fathers' behaviours and circumstances.

Consider:

- Past experiences with services
- [Trauma](#), Adverse Childhood Experiences and lived experience
- External pressures (finances, substance use, bereavement - [see Trio of Vulnerabilities](#)).
- Minimisation or parental alienation
- Domestic Abuse (manipulation or coercive control)



Remember

Fathers may also be victims - avoid assumptions and triangulate information. Be aware of unconscious bias and how your own experiences influence judgement.

Consider factors such as age, including the additional barriers faced by young fathers.

Accessing Services

- [Home - Rosalie Ryrie](#)
- [HOME | Fatherhood Institute](#)
- [Dad Matters | Home | Home-Start UK](#)
- [Support for Dads – Wakefield Families Together](#)

Useful Resources:

- [Find A Support Group - ANDYSMANCLUB](#)
- [DadPad | The Essential Guide for New Dads](#)

Supporting Documents

- [NHS Lift the Baby](#)
- [Supporting dads | Anna Freud](#)
- [rip frontline briefing working with men web.pdf](#)
- [Men's health: a strategic vision for England | CP 1432](#)

Research papers / Evidence

- [Shared-care-and-well-being-outcomes-for-families](#)
- [ALSPAC UK - Father involvement in early child-rearing and behavioural outcomes in their pre-adolescent children](#)
- [Norfolk| SCP - Fathers-and-outcomes-for-children](#)
- [Shared care, father's involvement in care and family well-being outcomes: A Literature Review](#)

Visit the [WSCP Engaging Men toolkit](#) for more links, guidance and practical tools

